

# The Moderns

## 1900-1950

- I. World War I
  - a. Turning point
  - b. Loss of innocence
  - c. Disillusionment with tradition
  - d. Great Depression & New York Stock Market Crash
  - e. Modernism
    - i. Bold experimentation and a rejection of traditional themes/styles
- II. American Dream
  - a. America as new Eden
    - i. Land of beauty, bounty, & unlimited promise/opportunities
    - ii. *Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
  - b. Optimism
    - i. Ever-expanding opportunity & abundance (progress)
  - c. Triumph of the individual
    - i. Independent
    - ii. Self-reliant
- III. Breakdown of beliefs & traditions
  - a. Pull away from New England
  - b. Marxism
    - i. Opposite of American capitalism and free enterprise
    - ii. Karl Marx = a classless society where everything is owned communally and everyone receives equal benefits & rewards
  - c. Psychoanalysis
    - i. Sigmund Freud
      - 1. Workings of the unconscious mind
      - 2. New understanding of human sexuality and the role it plays in unconscious thoughts

- 3. Led to growing interest in psychology
  - ii. Led to stream of consciousness
    - 1. Narrative technique
    - 2. Abandoned chronology
    - 3. Moment-by-moment flow of perceptions and memories
    - 4. Katherine Anne Porter & William Faulkner
- IV. Jazz Age
  - a. Constitution – prohibit the manufacturing & sales of alcohol
    - i. Social evil
    - ii. Led to: bootlegger, speakeasy, cocktail, short-skirted flapper, jazz, and gangster
  - b. F. Scott Fitzgerald & Edna St. Vincent Millay (poet)
  - c. Pleasure abroad more interesting
    - i. France & the French Riviera
      - 1. Exotic, grace, luxury, & easy, legal drinking
- V. New American Hero
  - a. Ernest Hemmingway
    - i. Man of action, warrior, tough competitor
    - ii. Code of honor, courage, and endurance
    - iii. “Grace under pressure”
  - b. Plain style
- VI. Modernist Poetry
  - a. Explored artistic Europe
  - b. Learned from modernist painting
    - i. Henri Matisse
    - ii. Pablo Picasso
  - c. New way of seeing & thinking
  - d. Symbolism
    - i. World of appearances is violently rearranged by artists who seek a different and more truthful version of reality
    - ii. Portray the emotional effects, not describe objects
    - iii. Ezra Pound & T.S. Eliot

e. Imagism

- i. Poetry made purer by concentration on the precise, clear, unqualified image
- ii. Imagery could carry a poem's emotion and message
- iii. No frills – hard image to communicate feeling and thought
- iv. William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens

VII. Poetry in America

- a. Defying modernism
- b. Said things in plain American speech
- c. Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, & Edgar Lee Masters
- d. American character types

VIII. Harlem Renaissance

- a. African American culture to America
- b. Came from section of New York City north of 110<sup>th</sup> St. Manhattan
- c. Poetry based rhythms on spirituals and jazz
- d. Lyrics on songs = blues
- e. Diction = street talk of the ghettos
- f. James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen